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The extent of personalization within party-websites during three election campaigns for the European parliament

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Summary

English

Personalization in politics has become a central concept in the discussions on how campaign style has changed over the years. In general it means that there is a shift from the focus on the party or other political institutions, to the focus on the candidates or person. Personalization research could be divided into politician's behavior, media coverage and voter's behavior. This research is a combination of the first two types and aims to look for an increase in the extent of personalization within party-websites in the 2004, 2009 and 2014 European election campaigns in the Netherlands. The websites of the SP, GroenLinks, PvdA, ChristenUnie-SGP, D66, CDA, and VVD are observed. The theoretical framework used to answer the research question conceptualizes personalization into two dimensions: *privatization* and *individualization*. These dimensions are divided into sub-dimensions. *General visibility, concentrated visibility* and *multimedia* for the *individualization* dimension and *personal preferences, home and family* and *professional* are the sub-dimension for the *privatization* dimension. Finally the concept is made measurable by formulating appropriate indicators for the sub-dimensions. The dataset is constructed from the DNPP archive from the University of Groningen as a part of the Archipol project. If possible the websites from the parties are coded by a search tool of the archive, if not manually to a depth of four clicks. An increase of personalization over the years is expected and the results support the conclusion that the websites are increasingly personalized in every sequential European election. This conclusion is based on the coded score. The coded score is a scale build on the time the indicators were present in the website. In 2004 a total score of 107 was calculated, in 2009 a score of 143 and in 2014 a score of 173. The overall scores for each dimension did also increase each sequential election, except for the privatization dimension. This dimension shows a small decrease between 2009 and 2014. The multimedia sub-dimension on the contrary has increased the most over the years, whereas the visibility sub-dimension has remained quite stable. In general the differences and the increase in personalization can be explained by the adoption of Social media as campaign tool and the integration of Social media in the party-websites. The research is valuable since there is a little known about personalization in party-websites, especially not on a European scale and for the main website instead of personal pages. However the value of it could be increased by integrating the extent to which a website is policy centred. Unfortunately this was beyond the scope of this research.

Nederlands

De personalisatie van de politiek is een centraal concept geworden in de discussie over hoe de campagnestijl is veranderd door de jaren heen. In het algemeen betekent het dat er een verschuiving is van de focus op de partijen naar de focus politici. Onderzoek naar personalisatie kan worden onderverdeeld in het gedrag van politici, media-aandacht en het gedrag van kiezers. Dit onderzoek is een combinatie van de eerste twee doelen en tracht te beschrijven in welke mate de websites van de SP, GroenLinks, PvdA, ChristenUnie-SGP, D66, CDA, en de VVD gepersonaliseerd zijn gedurende de campagnes voor de Europese parlementsverkiezingen van 2004, 2009 en 2014. Het theoretische kader is gebruikt om de onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden en conceptualiseert personalisatie in twee dimensies: *privatisering en individualisering*. Deze dimensies zijn verdeeld in sub-dimensies. *Algemene zichtbaarheid, geconcentreerde zichtbaarheid* en *multimedia* zijn gebruikt voor de i*ndividualisering* dimensie en *persoonlijke voorkeuren, huis en familie* en *professioneel* zijn de sub-dimensies voor de *privatisering* dimensie. Uiteindelijk is het personalisatie concept meetbaar gemaakt door passende indicatoren te formuleren voor de sub-dimensies. De dataset is geconstrueerd vanuit het DNPP archief van de Universiteit Groningen als onderdeel van het Archipol project. De websites van de partijen zijn gecodeerd indien mogelijk door een online zoekmachine van het archief zelf. Als dit niet mogelijk is, dan is het handmatig gedaan tot een diepte van vier lagen. Een toename in de mate van personalisatie over de jaren heen is verwacht en de resultaten ondersteunen de conclusie die gebaseerd is op de gecodeerde score. De gecodeerde score bestaat uit een schaal geconstrueerd op de keren dat de indicatoren aanwezig waren op de website. In 2004 werd er een totaalscore van 107 berekend, in 2009 een totaalscore van 143 en in 2014 een totaalscore van 173. De totaalscores per dimensie nemen ook elke opeenvolgende verkiezing toe, behalve de *privatiseringsdimensie*. Deze dimensie laat een kleine daling zien in 2009 ten opzichte van 2014. De *multimedia* sub-dimensie is echter het meest toegenomen in de opeenvolgende verkiezingen. De *zichtbaarheid* sub-dimensie is redelijk stabiel gebleven. In het algemeen zijn de verschillen in de mate van personalisatie te verklaren door de opname van sociale media in het campagneapparaat en de integratie van sociale media in de websites hiervan. Dit onderzoek is waardevol omdat men nog weinig weet van personalisatie in de websites van politieke partijen. In het bijzonder niet op een Europese schaal en voor de algemene websites in plaats van de persoonlijke pagina's van de politici. Hoe dan ook de waarden kan worden vergroot door de mate waarin een website beleids-georiënteerd is te integreren. Helaas is dit buiten het bereik van dit onderzoek geweest.

Table of contents

Introduction

In recent discussions on the changing features of politics in advanced industrial democracies, personalization is considered one of the key developments (McAllister, 2007; Stanyer, 2008; Van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2012). The rise of candidate-centred politics is presumably caused by declining party membership, decreases in compartmentalization and increases in floating voters. These developments have forced politicians to search for other strategies to win votes. The concept of personalization is used in relation to the media coverage, politician's' behavior (in election campaigns) and voter's behavior (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Kriesi, 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2012). Voters may make their electoral choices increasingly based on leaders or candidates. Political parties may make a candidate the centre of their communication, politicians may increasingly behave as an individual, rather than a member of a party and in addition the media portrays politicians as individuals rather than a part of a collective. Most scholars in the field of political communication did research after the personalization concept regarding the role of the media (Balmas & Sheafer, 2013; Kriesi, 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2012). A minority of scholars however, did research regarding the behavioural side of personalization (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Stanyer, 2008; Vliegenthart, 2012). This research focusses on a combination of both media- and behavioural sides regarding personalization and specifically the parties' own media.

The general impression of personalization is that the focus of media and parties has shifted from organizations and institutions to candidates and leaders often portrayed as private persons. Despite this impression, there is no total agreement among scholars. McAllister (2007) for instance, found substantial evidence for the increasing visibilities of candidates at the expense of parties. Kriesi (2012) on the other hand found very weak to no evidence, except for the Netherlands.

However, following the general impression of the upcoming integration of new media in party-websites seems to suit this shift. New media is one of the new opportunities for direct communication from politician and party to voters without the intervention of a journalist. This is an excellent example of how parties and politicians themselves are using a more individualized and personalized campaign style. The opportunities for parties to integrate the new media has increased over the years. These growing availability of electronic communication and its development is according to Stanyer (2008) one of the key factors contributing to personalization. A collective term for this 'new' media, as a result of professionalization, is digital campaigning. According to Van Selm, Jankowski, and Tsaliki (2002) digital campaigning could be divided into three categories: 'Obtaining information', 'engaging in deliberation' and 'participation in deliberation and decision making'. The first category refers to the access to information made available via electronic networks, the second category refers to the opportunities for citizens to take part in politically oriented debates and the third category consists of two manifestations of decision-making. On one hand by institutionalized channels and on the other by collective actions occurring outside the vested political order. However, all these categories and forms of digital campaigning are closely connected to each other. Political parties use this new media in the form of websites, email and social media. Until now there is not much empirical research done on this aspect of personalization. Vliegenthart (2012) did research after the extent of personalization in the campaign posters of the last 50 years in the Netherlands. Hermans and Vergeer (2012) did research after to what extent personalization and personal information had effect on the candidates websites. Nevertheless there is hardly any empirical research concerning personalization in the European Parliament elections in the Netherlands and almost none which concerns the party-websites. According to the Eurobarometer (2015) the density of internet connections in the Netherlands belongs to the highest in Europe together with Sweden. The use of social media networks is very high in both countries. The only difference between the

Netherlands and Sweden is that evidence for personalization in the media has been found before in the Netherlands by Kriesi (2012) as an exception compared to other European countries. Therefore, the Netherlands is estimated as the country with the biggest chances of evidence for an increased extent of personalization in party-websites. There already is evidence for personalization in the media, since the internet density is high just as the use of social network. The European parliament elections are chosen of their secondary character according to the voters, as stated by Hix and Marsh (2007), this means that if there is evidence for an increase in personalization of party-websites during these elections in the Netherlands, it is more likely to discover the same pattern for other (national) elections than the other way around.

This leads to the following research question: *Does the extent of personalization in the party-websites of the SP, GroenLinks, PvdA, ChristenUnie-SGP, D66, CDA, and VVD increase during the campaigns of the 2004, 2009, 2014 Dutch European Elections?*

This research aims to describe the extent to which indicators of personalization are present during the European parliament election campaigns in the Netherlands within the party-websites of the SP, GroenLinks, PvdA, ChristenUnie-SGP, D66, CDA, and VVD. In order to look for an increase in every sequential election a content analysis is done. Van Aelst et al. (2012) provides the two main dimensions of this research: *privatization* and *individualization*. Hermans and Vergeer (2012) constructed three sub-dimensions used for the *privatization* dimension: professional, personal preference and home and family. The dimension *individualization* is divided into three sub-dimensions: general visibility, concentrated visibility by Van Aelst and multimedia. Indicators are constructed on the basis of this framework.

The dataset is constructed from the observations in the DNPP database. All websites are coded on the presence of indicators and the amount of times the indicator is present. This is done by one moment in time each election from 2004 on. The coded websites are presented in orderly tables and graphs distinguishing elections and indicators, in order to draw conclusions. The more times an indicator is present, the higher the extent of personalization within a website, this is the theory on which said conclusion is based.

In short, at first a theoretical framework provides a very first view on the research question and the expected answer of the research question, second a methodological framework explains how things will be measured, third the results are presented and finally a conclusion is drawn.

Theoretical Framework

According to Vliegenthart (2012) people used to vote for the party that corresponded to their respective group in society. From the mid 1960's on, the compartmentalization ('verzuiling') of the society in the Netherlands started to disappear. This implicitly decreased the importance of party loyalty and therefore led to declining party membership and an increasing amount of floating voters. This applies to the electorate in the case of national elections and this applies to even more elections on a European level. According to Hix and Marsh (2007) European elections are secondary to the main (national) electoral contest, and they are "national" contests rather than "European" contests. Also Norris and Reif (1997) are considering the European elections as second order elections, no matter how significant for the legitimacy of the EU. This lack of interest in European Politics is confirmed by the turnout rates of the last elections.

To prevent a lack of democratic legitimacy, political parties need to professionalize their communication activities and develop new campaign tools and communication strategies. Professionalization, as seen, is often introduced through a discourse of fundamental change and one that sets off the present from the past (Negrine & Lilleker, 2002). Campaigns will be changing in this way. According to (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999), (Lilleker, Tenscher, & Štětka, 2014) there are three ages of professionalization: age 1 (party dominated), age 2 (television-adds introduced) and age 3 (strategic communication). With the introduction of the World Wide Web the fourth age of professionalization is entered and has created new digital opportunities for campaigning.

Lilleker et al. (2014) states that the adoption of new digital campaign techniques is an extension of the campaign tools rather than a replacement. Although, digital campaigning has become a very important part of the campaign toolbox for parties.

This research is concentrating on party-websites as a form of digital campaigning. A website is a party's own media and is created without the intervention of a journalist. According to recent discussions, party-websites seems to be increasingly personalized and focusing on the candidates instead of the parties. Together with the introduction of social media it is possible for parties to directly communicate with voters on a individual level. At the same time politicians are also providing the public with more personal characteristics. According to Hermans and Vergeer (2012) this individualized form of digital campaigning could be interpreted as a strategy to seek votes based on personality.

Personalization

The personalization of the political landscape is discussed many times in the literature (Bennett, 2012; Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2012). Although there is some disagreement between scholars, personalization of politics is often described as the development from a policy-centred approach to a candidate-centred approach.

Studies on personalization in a broader perspective can be divided into three areas, media coverage, politician's' behavior (in election campaigns) and voter's behavior (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Kriesi, 2012). Most of the research done in this field focuses on media coverage (Balmas & Sheafer, 2013; Kriesi, 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2012). In general the results are considered a development to a more personal and individual approach on politics in the media. On the contrary, the study of Bennett (2012) is one of the few focussing on voter's behaviour concerning the personalization concept. Bennett (2012) states that social fragmentation and the decline of societal group loyalties are the key aspects of the personalization in politics and with the introduction of social media, these individualists become collective again without knowing. As discussed, the personalization topic has a lot of different facets of interests. It is beyond the reach of this study to extensively discuss every approach. This study is focussing on the personalization of party-websites indicated by different

elements on the websites.

Studies on personalization in parties' and candidates own communication platforms are rare (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Stanyer, 2008; Van Selm et al., 2002; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013; Vliegenthart, 2012). Stanyer (2008) however, argues that one of the key factors of a website from a political party is to project their identity. The information provided, on such websites however, is quite static and passive and the rapidly changing view on politicians in the media cannot influence this. Politicians are continuously seeking to create a right impression amongst the audience and the disclosure of information is carefully managed in order to influence the impressions which audiences construct. Stanyer (2008) argues that the behavior of politicians is aimed at influencing the behavior of voters. This strategy behind the content of the party-website is a good example for personalization of the party-websites. The study Van Aelst et al. (2012) distinguishes the concept of personalization in relation to the media content in two forms. The first form is *individualization*, which is defined as focus on individual politicians as central actors in the political arena, including their ideas, capacities and policies. The second form Van Aelst distinguishes is *privatization*, which is defined as a shift from a politician who is occupying a public role to a private person. Hermans and Vergeer (2012) on their turn provide some empirical evidence of the personalization strategy on candidates' websites in the 2009 European Parliament elections. The Netherlands scored relatively low on this personalization strategy, although this research observed candidate-websites, instead of party-websites. Finally Kriesi (2012) states that the alleged personalization refers to two related phenomena: a stronger focus on candidates/politicians instead of parties, institutions, or issues; and a change in the criteria for the evaluation of politicians, from features regarding their professional competence and performance to features concerning non-political personality traits. After all, by providing all different kinds of information candidates are continuously looking for the best way to project their personal identity within their own media. All this is part of the parties' e-campaign.

(E)-campaigning

The role of party-websites has been changed over the last years under the influence of technological developments. In the presidential campaign of Obama in 2008 social networks such as Twitter, MySpace and Facebook were used on a great scale for the first time. In the research of Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez (2011) this campaign is considered to be mainly responsible for this significant change in the world of e-campaigning. As a consequence of this successful innovative campaign, social media was adopted by other parties and other elections in other countries as well.

However, in the Netherlands, the integration of social media in election campaigns lasts somewhat longer. Vergeer et al. (2013) found that during the 2009 European election in the Netherlands, Twitter as social media was still used reluctantly. On the other hand, Effing, van Hillegersberg, and Huibers (2011) already show the integration of social media to a greater extent during the 2010 and 2011 elections. Effing et al. (2011) stated that government and state could create opportunities for political participation with the use of social media. This is supported by earlier research which found that together with the growing amount of internet connections and the adoption of social media, the web presence of political parties and its candidates in the Netherlands has increased in the period under research (Boogers & Voerman, 2003; Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Van Selm et al., 2002). Therefore in this research Social media is assumed to be contributing to the personalization of websites.

However, a party-website exists out of more than social media and has other factors that contribute to the extent of personalization. For instance, almost every website contains information about the candidate such as contact information, the party program and campaign information. This information varies from very personal information which has nothing to do with politics up to statements about policy. During the first online campaigns, the most fully developed characteristic of

party and candidate-websites has been the availability of campaign information (Gulati & Williams, 2007). This lowest level, or stage, is the establishment of a web presence and posting of informational content that has been reproduced from other offline media sources, archived, and transmitted to web site viewers (Gulati & Williams, 2007). One of the keywords of this period was Web 1.0. The next generation of online campaigns was dominated by another keyword, Web 2.0. According to Vergeer et al. (2013) Web 2.0 services combines multiple features, making it a one-stop platform for the dissemination of multi-media content, socializing, and blogging. A party-website was not just a source of information any more. This next generation of online campaigns affords website users some degree of coproduction of content (from personalization to blog entries or online chats and virtual town meetings), two-way communication, and follow-up offline or online activity (Gulati & Williams, 2007).

This might be the biggest contribution to the extent of personalization on a website. It was no longer a party or a politician who placed information on the website, but also voters could contribute. In this way participation seems to be the key concept that explains the difference between 'old' web and 'new' web. This also means that although social media was not yet available in 2004, basic tools for interaction such as chat and forum were in the early days of the World Wide Web (Effing et al., 2011).

The digital campaign style of politicians is being personalized and individualized, due to technological developments but also societal changes are contributing to an increase of personalization in election campaigns. In doing so, politicians try to decrease the psychological distance between themselves and voters (Vergeer et al., 2013). It is hard to find any empirical research from earlier studies concerning the personalization of party-websites, certainly not a longitudinal study focused on the European elections in the Netherlands. This study seeks to describe the extent to which a party-website is personalized during three European elections in the Netherlands. Therefore the personal information mentioned on a website together with the applications will be analysed on the basis of the following conceptualization.

Conceptualization

As stated before, studies of personalization in politics could be classified into three categories: media coverage, politicians' behavior (in election campaigns) and voters' behavior (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Kriesi, 2012). The three areas of research all need different conceptualizations. Previous studies on websites were focused on personal pages of the candidates (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Stanyer, 2008). This study focuses on the general party-website. In the first place, this study is about the behavior of politicians since it aims to reveal the extent to which politicians provide personal information on the party-websites. In the second place it aims to describe the extent to which the content of the party-website is personalized for every election, since a party-website is the party's own media channel and exists of more than solely information about the candidates.

To describe the extent to which the whole part-website is personalized and to discover a possible increase through the sequential elections, the first step is to give a definition of the personalization concept in the context of this research. Personalization in this research is about the presence of personal information and particular applications on the party-website, the more personal information and applications, the greater the extent of personalization. In addition, personalization is about the image a party will project by using their website. Is there any possibility for interaction with candidates, for example social media? In other words about the extent to which a website is candidate centred or party-centred.

Dimensions

In this research the dimensions of Van Aelst et al. (2012) will be used as a starting point. These dimensions are formulated after an extensive comparison of the personalization literature on media

coverage. The two dimensions he distinguishes are *individualization* and *privatization*. *Individualization* is defined by Van Aelst et al. (2012) as the increasing focus on the individual politicians and the diminished focus on the parties. *Privatization* is defined by Van Aelst et al. (2012) as the shifting focus of seeing politicians as occupants of a public role to a private individual. On the basis of these dimensions it is possible to make a distinction between the 'multimedia' parts of the website, the way a party present its politicians and the 'personal' part of the website, where personal information about the candidate is projected.

In other words two dimensions of personalization in this research are the *privatization* and the *individualization* of websites. Both dimensions of personalization are distinguishable in most of the websites under investigation. The greater the extent to which indicators are present, the more personalized a website is. It is beyond the scope of this research to look after both the extent to which a website is candidate centred and the extent to which a website is party-centred. Nevertheless, it is expected that there will be some attention for policy issues on the website. In the next paragraph the dimensions of Van Aelst will be divided in sub-dimensions.

Sub-dimensions

Van Aelst et al. (2012) makes a distinction between two sub-dimensions in the first dimension of individualization: *general visibility* and *concentrated visibility*. *General visibility* is on the shift of the increasing attention towards individual politicians. *Concentrated visibility* concerns the same shift, except this sub-dimension is only focusing on the leading candidates for the concerning election and the party leaders. A distinction is important since it is considered normal when a leading candidate for the particular election is mentioned. On the party-websites there is expected to be less attention towards other candidates. Both sub-dimensions detect the personalization concept within the websites. However, the number of times they are present determine the extent of personalization. The more pages a candidate is mentioned on, the higher the extent of personalization.

Since it was previously mentioned that social media is one of the key factors which contributes to a higher extent of personalization on the individual level, this sub-dimension is added in the name of *'multimedia'*. But, according to the prior theory, there were also other types of communication methods to interact and communicate with the party. In general, the presence of any kind of media focused mainly on a candidate or party-leader indicates the personalization concept. Again the more personalized media is present, the higher the extent of personalization of the party-websites. For the second dimension Van Aelst describes, the conceptual framework of Hermans and Vergeer (2012) will be used as sub-dimensions. This simply fits better in answering the research question. In the research of Hermans and Vergeer they coded 738 candidate sites from 17 countries via a standardized measurement. Out of these websites they formulated three dimensions: *Professional, Personal preferences* and *home and family*. The first sub-dimension of the second dimension is about the career of the politician, their résumé and other *professional* information. The second sub-dimension is about their *personal preferences*, for example their favourite music. The last sub-dimension is related to *home and family* and is concentrated on marital status and children. In this research these dimensions will be used as a sub-dimension in order to determine the dimension *privatization*. The more personal information is provided, the higher the extent of personalization. In the methods section, the indicators for this dimension will be discussed more extensively, however the next paragraph already provides a general description.

Indicators

Since the study of Van Aelst et al. (2012) already provides the indicators for two of the sub-dimensions, these will be used to determine the extent to which the website is concentrated on the leading candidates for the particular election, the party leaders or all candidates. So, the more pages on which a candidate is mentioned, the more personalized a party-website is.

As stated before, the presence of social media such as Twitter and Facebook is one of the technological developments which contributes to the degree of personalization of party-websites. It is beyond the scope of these study to extensively analyse the content of social media, but the presence of a link to this is already an indicator. Other media items are also considered to be indicators of the *multimedia* sub-dimension, for instance forums, movies, pictures etc. The presence of these does not necessarily mean that a website is more personalized,since these could also be party-centred, therefore they will be listened or watched to determine if they are candidate focused. The indicators for the second dimension of van Aelst will be the same as in the study of Hermans and Vergeer (2012). Hermans and Vergeer already provide a standardized framework. The indicators for the sub dimension p*rofessional* are: the description of a political career, official positions of politicians, political achievements and education. The indicators for *personal preferences* are favourite writer, favourite TV program, favourite music, favourite website and favourite sports. The sub-dimension *home and family* has the following indicators: marital status and children. Again, the more times the indicators discussed are present on the websites, the more personalized the party-website is.

In general, scholars discuss personalization of politics as a phenomenon that increases over the years. This research places this into the perspective of party-websites. Since there is also an ongoing technological development in the period of research, it is assumed that the extent of personalization in party-websites will increase in every sequential election for every party and for every distinguished dimension. In other words, it is to be expected that the evidence in the party-websites of all distinguished dimensions will be greater for every sequential election and that for every election there will be more of the indicators present in the party-websites. In this way the research question could answer these expectations for the increasing extent of personalization of the party-websites. In the next section, a description of the data is provided and personalization will be further operationalized in order to answer the research question.

Methods

Operationalization

In this section, the research question will be made measurable based on the theory and conceptualization. First, the selected cases will be discussed, second the form for the coding of the websites and finally, the indicators will be discussed.

Case selection

It is beyond the scope of this research to analyse all parties who participated in the European parliament elections in the Netherlands in 2004, 2009 and 2014. The selection of parties is made on the basis of two criteria. For this research, firstly, parties need to have participated in all three elections in order to make a comparison between the elections. In the second place all parties need to have won any seat in all three elections. It is not relevant for this research to examine a party which participated in all three elections, but only won a seat once, therefore its share in the electorate is simply too small. With this criteria there are some problems with the ChristenUnie and the SGP. To strengthen their position they decided to act as one party for the European Elections. It depends on the dimension in which way this problem has been tackled and this will be explained in the data-section but most dimensions are seen as one. The cases selected on the basis of the criteria above are: the SP, GroenLinks, PvdA, ChristenUnie-SGP, D66, CDA, and VVD.

In this research, both the party-websites especially made for the European Elections and the general party-websites will be studied. The general website will be used as a starting point. This is necessary because not every party had a separate website for the European Elections. In 2004 it was quite normal to have a separate website for the European Elections, however even then it was already integrated in the main website. Ever since this became the normal procedure, the European websites will be used to fill in the gaps of the general website caused by a database failure. All the selected observations from the party-websites are made during the election campaign of the particular election. The observation is made on a date as close to the election date as possible. The exact dates of observation could be found in the attachment.

The last cases, which have to be selected, are the webpages from the website. Since all the coding for this research is done by hand, it is impossible to code every web-page. Another reason for not coding all web-pages is that they are not fully available. On the contrary, some questions asked for coding the website are based on manifest coding. This implies that it is simply a matter of counting words. With the online tool of DNPP this could be done automatically, therefore every page stored will be coded. If possible the whole website will be coded automatically on the specific word, if not a maximum of four layers (clicks) will be analysed. In general, this is sufficient to get an overall view of the extent of personalization on a party-website.

Since personalization is often described as the increased attention for a candidate, candidates themselves also have to be selected for separate coding. The most important candidate is the leading candidate of that particular election since he or she gets the most attention from outside, the party uses this from the inside. For that same reason, the party leaders are included in this research. This might be a bit odd, because you can't choose them as a representative in the European Parliament. However this is necessary since in the Netherlands almost every election is made national as Hix and Marsh (2007) already stated. In this case there is a lot of attention for the party leader, no matter which election campaign is running. Apart from the party leader and the leading candidate for the European parliament election there are also other candidates. The other candidates are seen as one because it is very unlikely that a regular candidate gets the same amount of attention as the leading one. Therefore, a distinction is made in this research of three categories for analysis: 'party leader', 'leading candidate' and the 'other candidates'

The upcoming table for coding the websites needs some explanation. The first dimension of *individualization* is used to code the websites for all distinguished kinds of candidates. The second dimension, *privatization* will be coded separately for each kind of candidate for three times. If all the websites are coded they will be analysed and displayed in different tables on the basis of variables (indicators) and (sub-) dimensions. To make comparing the results more clear, another division will be made in the presentation of the results. The results will be divided into three parts, *visibility, multimedia* and *privatization*. Every website will be coded once. If there is more than one website for the same party in the same year, the main site will be coded, and the other will be used to fill the gaps. This is only possible, because in this case the 'other' websites are part of the main website, except they are stored separately by the DNPP. Every party will be weighted equally to make it possible to compare the three elections and the seven parties. The websites became a lot bigger in the last decade. This means that if in 2004 a website is coded on the pages where the leading candidate's name is mentioned it is likely, since the website is bigger in 2014, that the pages of the leading candidate's name are mentioned more frequently in 2014. The website would be classified as more personal, whereas in reality the website is simply bigger. To prevent this bias from happening, the pages where a name is mentioned on the party-websites are counted and will be calculated in an absolute number and as a percentage of pages a website exists of. After that the percentages will be coded in numbers in order to get an overall score of all dimensions and indicators. The other dimensions will also be coded to let every indicator have the same scale. This scale is a scale from 1 to 5 and used for every dimension. In this way the overall score can be calculated and the research question could be answered. The coded scores are provided in the attachment in Table 6. Nevertheless, in general the rule has not changed. The more counts of an indicator, the more a personalized a website is.

The data for this research was collected for the election campaigns of the 2004, 2009 and 2014 European parliament elections in the Netherlands. In this research the database of the Documentation centre for Dutch political Parties at the University of Groningen is used. This database contains an archived version of every political website since 2000. This database is constructed for the Archipol project. The Dutch party-websites were collected from this database for one moment in time each election campaign, see attachment Table 2. Since almost every party-website is fully accessible and functioning like it used to be on the moment of storage, these are coded with a standardized form. It may occur that this is not the case and the website is not accessible or just partly. In this case a different moment in time will be observed. If still no results, this observation will be reported as a missing value.

First, three kinds of politicians were selected for every party. The leading candidate for that particular election (lijstrekker), the party leader and the other candidates who were also elected for the parliament. This last kind of politician is seen as one, since there was too little attention for them individually to code these eventual members of parliament separately. The collected party-websites were coded using a standardized form. The form is constructed on the basis of the previously mentioned dimensions and indicators. The first section of the form is coding the *general-* and *concentrated visibility* on the websites, as seen in Table 1. These two sub-dimensions will be coded with the use of a web-tool. This tool counts on how many pages the name of every kind of politician is mentioned on the whole party-website. For the other candidates, the elected ones, every name of them was filled in the tool and the numbers of the pages where the name was mentioned, were added. The first column indicates whether the indicator is present or not, the second column gives an overview for the number of times the indicator is present on a specific date of observation. The higher the percentage of pages on where a candidates' name is mentioned, the more personalized the party-website is.

Table 1: Coding form for general and concentrated visibility

	Yes = '1' No = '2'	Counts 03-05-04
General Visibility		
Is the name mentioned of the other candidates?		
Concentrated visibility		
Is the name mentioned of the leading candidate for this election?		
Is the name mentioned of the party leader?		

Table 2 gives the coding form for the next sub-dimension, *multimedia*. This table has the same principal as Table 1. The first column provides an indication whether the indicator is present on the website, the second column counts the times this indicator is observed. Different to Table 1, this table is coded manually. The websites are observed to a maximum depth of four clicks starting from the main page. It was impossible to count every page that was stored as the navigation tools of the site were not fully functioning and there was a lot of overlapping. Concerning time issues, it is decided to concentrate on the presence of unique objects which are indicating the presence of an indicator. This could be seen as a representative sample for the entire website. The first three questions are the indicators for the presence of social media on the website. Again a distinction will be made between the described kinds of candidates. For these indicators the column 'counts' refers to the number of references to social media. This is also applicable to the question about the Twitter Feed. The interaction possible with social media is quite individualized since it could be directed to one person, which makes it personal, as already stated by Gulati and Williams (2007). Other examples of social media which could be considered personal could be YouTube and Hyves. The following question is the indicator for the conventional methods of communication with the party. For this question counts are referring to the different possibilities of conventional communication. Each separate type is counted as one. A conventional type of communication could be a forum, an opinion poll, a discussion platform, etc. The following two questions are indicators of the personalization of audio visual media. The counts in this case referring to the number of personalized sources of audio-visual media. In order to determine whether this media is personal, the audio-visual media watched and assed if it is about a candidate or the party.

The last three questions are indicating whether there are pictures present of the described kinds of candidates. The counts are referring to the number of pictures on the observed pages. The presence of pictures from a candidate indicates the attention for him or her and attendance contributes to the extent of personalization.

Table 2 Coding form for multimedia use

	Yes = '1' No = '2'	Counts 03-05-04
Multimedia use		
Is there a link with Facebook?		
Party account/party leader		
leading candidate for this election		
other candidate		
Is there a link with Twitter?		
Party account/party leader		
leading candidate for this election		
other candidate		
Is there a link with any other social media app?		
Party account/party leader		
leading candidate for this election		
other candidate		
Is there a Twitter Feed on the website of any account?		
Is there any possibility to conventional communication with the party?		
Is there any form of other audio visual media present types?		
If so, does it have personal characteristics?		
Is there any picture of the leading candidate for this election?		
Is there any picture of the party leader?		
Is there any picture of other candidates?		

The last part of the form, Table 3, is coding the sub-dimensions of the *privatization* dimension: *professional, home and family*, and *personal preferences*. Unlike Table 1 and Table 2 the indicators in Table 3 will be coded three times. Once for every candidate, as described before. Firstly, there is a question for every sub-dimension whether an indicator of any kind is present. If answered with a 2, no, the score for the indicators of this sub dimension will automatically be zero. If answered with a 1, yes, then a distinction is made between the exact presences of the separate indicators. The 'count column' in this part of the form is not that relevant, except for the 'other candidates'. In their case the column counts relate to the number of candidates for who the indicator is present. Just like Table 2, this part of the coding form will be coded manually. The first questions focus on a description of their career, education or political achievements are very personal characteristics and for nobody the same. Candidates themselves differentiate with these indicators. The same is true for their preferences. This is in no way relevant for the function of a politician, however if they provide you with this information, the website is more candidate-centred. Also the marital status and children are facts which are not relevant for a politician's function. Therefore this indicates a level of personalization. In order to code this dimension properly, when an institution one has studied at is mentioned, this will also be an indicator. This goes for the description of the career and the political achievements as well.

For the indicators of *personal preference*, a title of a sports club, a TV program, a religion or the name of a writer is already enough to consider the indicator present. The marital status could be presented in ways such as: 'is getrouwd met', 'heeft een vrouw' or 'gehuwd'. One could be notified of possible children in such ways: 'heeft x kinderen', 'is vader' etc. The more personal information is provided, the higher the extent of personalization on this website.

Table 3 Coding form of privatization dimension

	Yes = '1' No = '2'	Counts 03-05-04
Professional		
Is there any information over the party leader about… ?		
Education		
Description of political career		
Political achievements		
Personal Preferences		
Is there any information over the party leader about… ?		
Favorite sports		
Favorite writer		
Favorite TV Program		
Place of birth		
Place of residence		
Religious conviction		
Sexuality		
Home and Family		
Is there any information over the party leader about… ?		
Marital state		
Children		

Results and analysis

In this section the results of the coding will be presented. First, the results of the *visibility* part of the coding scheme are presented. Second, the results of the *multimedia* part and third, the results on the *privatization* part. To conclude this chapter, the scores of all tables will be presented per election year in order to answer the research question.

Table 4 provides an overview of the extent to which the names of the described kinds of candidates are mentioned. The data of this table is coded by an online tool. This tool searches all the pages of the website for the names of the politicians. The result of this query was an overview of the total amount of pages stored, the times the name was mentioned and the number of pages the name was mentioned on. The last number is used to calculate the percentages in Table 4. Since every website does not exist out the same number of pages it is inappropriate to compare the absolute numbers. These percentages are the number of pages on which the described candidates are mentioned, divided by the total number of pages the website consists of, or at least the pages that have been stored. On the contrary with the other sub-dimensions, the SGP and ChristenUnie are coded separately based on their own candidates. Despite the fact that they share a website this website was not available in 2004. To prevent missing values both general sites of the SGP and ChristenUnie were coded for that election. For the other elections the shared website was coded, in that case for the party's own candidates. In the Attachment an overview is provided from the absolute numbers used in table 4.

Table 4: Visibility as the percentage from the number of pages where the name was mentioned by the overall number of pages

	2004			2009			2014		
	Party leader	Leading candidate of this election	Other candidates	Party leader	Leading candidate of this election	Other candidates	Party leader	Leading candidate of this election	Other candidates
VVD	1,1	2,4	3,9	11,0	8,5	4,6	3,3	0,7	0,7
CDA	5,5	3,1	10,0	4,5	6,0	5,5	3,2	3,9	2,9
D66	3,2	1,3	0,0	16,3	27,9	0,7	2,6	6,1	10,5
SGP	13,1	2,4	0,0	0,2	99,4	0,0	3,4	55,1	0,0
CU	23,3	4,8	0,0	1,7	11,0	0,0	1,7	61,9	0,0
PvdA	60,7	31,5	54,6	39,6	9,1	5,4	0,3	0,4	5,2
GroenLinks	5,4	5,2	6,3	20,4	6,4	3,9	23,8	31,6	30,4
SP	26,8	3,1	0,1	98,8	98,8	3,4	87,3	91,1	2,1

Figure 1 provides an overview of the numbers in Table 2. First, it is very clear that the candidates of the SP were represented to the highest extent in 2009 and 2014. This could indicate that for these sub-dimensions the SP website was personalized to the highest extent in 2009 and 2014 compared to the other parties. In 2004, the PvdA had the most attention for the candidates and would in that case be the most personalized website. This is unexpected since the PvdA website was decreasing in attention for candidates a lot in the sequential election campaigns. Another interesting pattern is that almost every party seems to be less concentrated on their politicians in 2014 compared to 2009. However, ChristenUnie and GroenLinks seem to be an exception. If the analysis is focussed on the kinds of candidates it is remarkable for the fact that in 2004 the PvdA had more attention for other candidates than the leading candidate for that election.

Figure 1: Percentage on the pages on which the names were mentioned per party per year
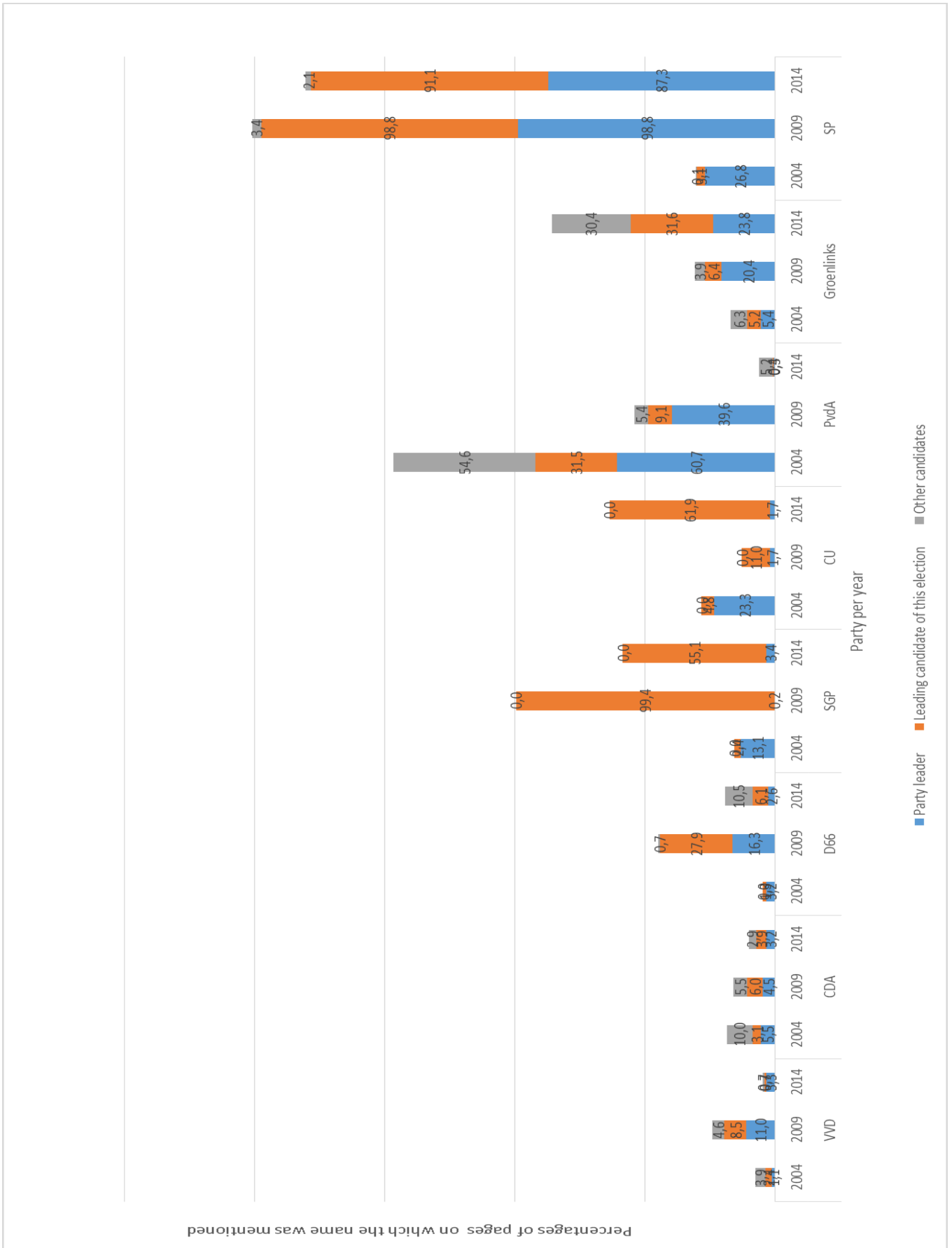
Also the CDA pays relatively more attention to other candidates in 2004 than other parties. An explanation for this could be that in 2004, the fractions of those two parties were a lot bigger than nowadays. This could also explain the lack of attention for the other candidates from the other parties. Nevertheless, GroenLinks seems to be an exception with a lot of attention for other candidates in 2014, although they are not a big fraction. Going further into the analysis of the 'other' candidates there seems to be far less attention in general for them than for the party leader and the leading candidate. Sometimes there is hardly any attention for the other candidates. This could be explained by the fact that European elections are second order elections (Hix & Marsh, 2007). The attention of the public is much lower compared to national elections. It was already stated that for this reason the well-known party leader is used in the campaign. Figure 1 is confirming this view. But also the attention for other candidates would in that case make no sense, since there is already hardly any interest for these elections. Focussing on the leading candidate and party leader would make it a lot easier for parties in order to convince people for voting on them. For this sub-dimension on an overall level, there is no clear evidence for an increase of personalization in the party-websites in the sequential elections. Often the percentages are lower in 2009 than 2014 and the percentages vary much between the years on a party level. Finally it is worth saying that, despite of the fact that the data is observed in during the election campaigns of the European elections, there is still a lot of attention for the party leader, sometimes even more than for the leading candidate of that election.

Table 5 is an overview of absolute numbers. Each number indicates the times a *multimedia* indicator was found on the website. The score for the parties are comparable since the samples of each website are equally large. The size of the websites varies, therefore it is not possible to draw a conclusion for the whole website on this dimension, but this sample indicates how the website is structured and says something about the extent of personalization in that way. Since not every group of indicators was present in each election, these were not provided in this overview. At the end of every election year, the total times indicators were present per party is showed and the total of the times the indicator was present for all parties together. The party total gives the total of the times an indicator was present for all elections per party.

For starters, it is very clear social media is a phenomenon that has strongly developed over the last couple of years. In 2004 it was not adopted (Twitter wasn't founded yet) and in 2009 not on a regular basis for all parties. This development seems to be the strongest explanation for the increase in the times the *multimedia* indicators are present. It is also visible that the amount of present indicators is increasing every year. This is confirmed by the overall scores per year. In 2004 indicators were 80 times present, in 2009 109 and in 2014, 180.

Table 5: Multimedia indicators in absolute numbers for the times present

		Indicators	VVD	CDA	D66	CU-SGP	PvdA	GL	SP	Total
2004		Conventional communication	3	4	6	5	3	3	10	34
		Personal audiovisual media	1	0	1	0	0	3	0	5
		Picture Leading candidate	2	1	2	2	2	2	0	11
		Picture Party leader	2	1	3	2	2	2	1	13
		Pictures other candidates	3	6		1	6	1	0	17
		Total	11	12	12	10	13	11	11	80
2009	Other social media	Party account	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
		leading candidate	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
		other candidate	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	4
		Conventional communication	4	6	6	3	4	4	10	37
		Personal audiovisual media	2	3	6	2	4	3	3	23
		Picture Leading candidate	1	1	3	2	2	2	2	13
		Picture Party leader	2	2	3	2	2	2	1	14
		Pictures other candidates	3	4	2	0	2	2	0	13
		Total	12	16	25	10	15	15	16	109
2014	Facebook	Party account	.	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
		leading candidate	.	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
		other candidate	.	4	3	0	0	0		7
	Twitter	Party account	.	0	1	1	1	1	1	5
		leading candidate	.	1	1	2	1	0	1	6
		other candidate	.	4	0	0	1	0		5
	Other social media	Party account	.	4	0	0	1	0	2	7
		leading candidate	.	0	1	0	1	0	2	4
		other candidate	.	0	2	0	2	0		4
		Twitter Feed	.	1	0	3	0	0	1	5
		Conventional communication	.	7	6	3	5	4	10	35
		Personal audiovisual media	.	11	6	2	4	5	4	32
		Picture Leading candidate	.	6	2	2	1	7	2	20
		Picture Party leader	.	5	2	2	2	8	1	20
		Pictures other candidates	.	13	3		1	4	2	23
		Total	0	57	29	15	21	30	28	180
		Party-total	23	85	66	35	49	56	55	369

Figure 2 gives an overview of the total amount of times the indicators were present for every election campaign per party. All parties show an increase in the times the indicators were present, except the CU-SGP. In their case the times an indicators was present remained the same between 2004 and 2009. The biggest increase in the times the multimedia indicators were present is within the website of the CDA, this is mainly caused by their enormous amount of communication possibilities with representatives. Another remarkable fact is that D66 was already far beyond the other parties in 2009 on the area of social media, however they did not develop much between 2009 and 2014 but are still one of the parties with the highest score. Since there was no access to the VVD-website during the 2014 election campaign, there are no values for this case.

Figure 2: Absolute number of times multimedia indicators present
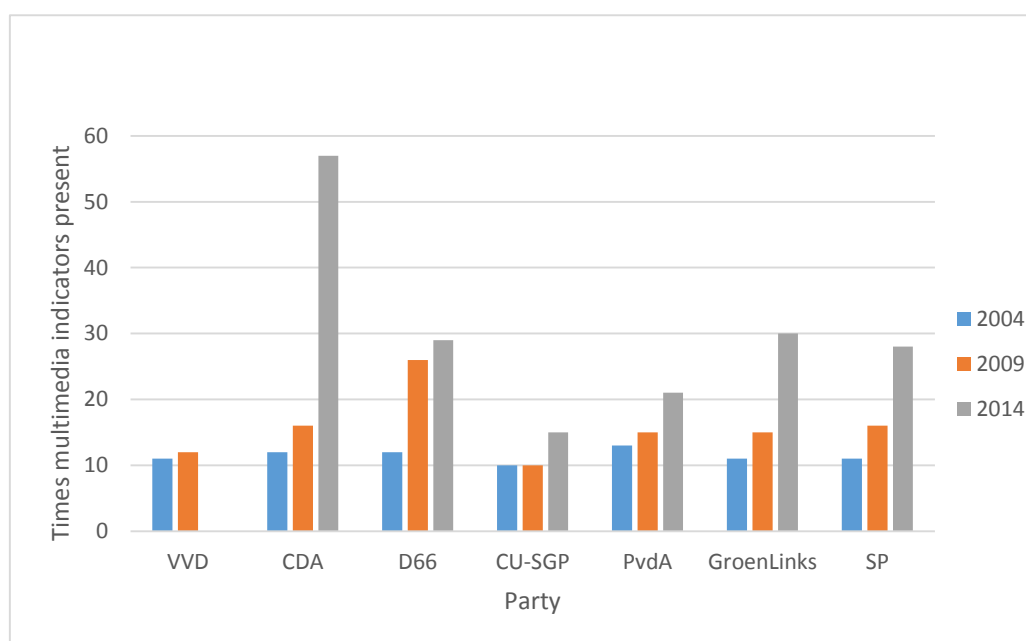
The following table gives an overview of the last group of indicators observed. Table 6 exists out of the data for the *privatization* dimension for every year and every kind of politician, as described before. In this table the numbers are absolute for the indicators present. So '5' means that for that particular politician five indicators of the privatization dimension were present. For this purpose, the website was observed to a maximum of four pages deep. As stated before it was not possible to count the pages. The total scores are given for every election year and per kind of politician. In 2004 there was no data available for the CU-SGP and in 2014 for the VVD.

Table 6: Privatization indicators in absolute numbers of presence per party and year

	2004				2009				2014				Party Total
	Party leader	Leading canidates	Other candidates	Total	Party leader	Leading canidates	Other candidat	Total	Party leader	Leading canidates	Other candidat	Total	
VVD	0	5	5	10	5	5	5	15	.	.	.	0	25
CDA	5	5	8	18	9	0	1	10	7	1	6	14	42
D66	5	0	0	5	7	8	0	15	5	5	5	15	35
CU-SGP	.	.	.	0	0	8	8	16	0	6	6	12	28
PvdA	0	5	5	10	5	3	5	13	2	3	2	7	30
GroenLinks	5	5	5	15	5	5	5	15	5	5	5	15	45
SP	9	5	5	19	10	6	8	24	11	7	8	26	69
Totaal	24	25	28	77	41	35	32	108	30	27	32	89	274

The next figure gives an overview of all indicators per year. The website of the SP clearly provides the most personal information about the candidates. In 2004, this website was already personalized on this dimension to a higher extent than every party in 2014. The only party which remains completely stable is GroenLinks, with no difference between the years and the information about any politician. Another remarkable fact is that in 2004 the VVD and PvdA and the CU-SGP in 2009 and 2014 did not provide any personal information about the party leader. In general the attention to the other candidates was quite high when compared to the visibility indicator, which is remarkable since the name was not mentioned on many pages compared to the other kinds of politicians.

On the total scores per year it is visible that there is an increase in personal information between 2004 and 2009, respectively in 2004 there was 77 times an indicator present in all party-websites. In 2009 this was 108. In 2014 this decreases to 89 times an indicator was present. This means that on this dimension the party-websites became personalized to a smaller extent in 2014 compared to 2009. However, the parties who are increasing the extent of personalization on this dimension are increasing extensively. In general this doesn't support an increase for the whole dimension, but on a party level, an increase was visible for some parties in every sequential election.

Figure 3: Absolute numbers of presence indicators per party and election year
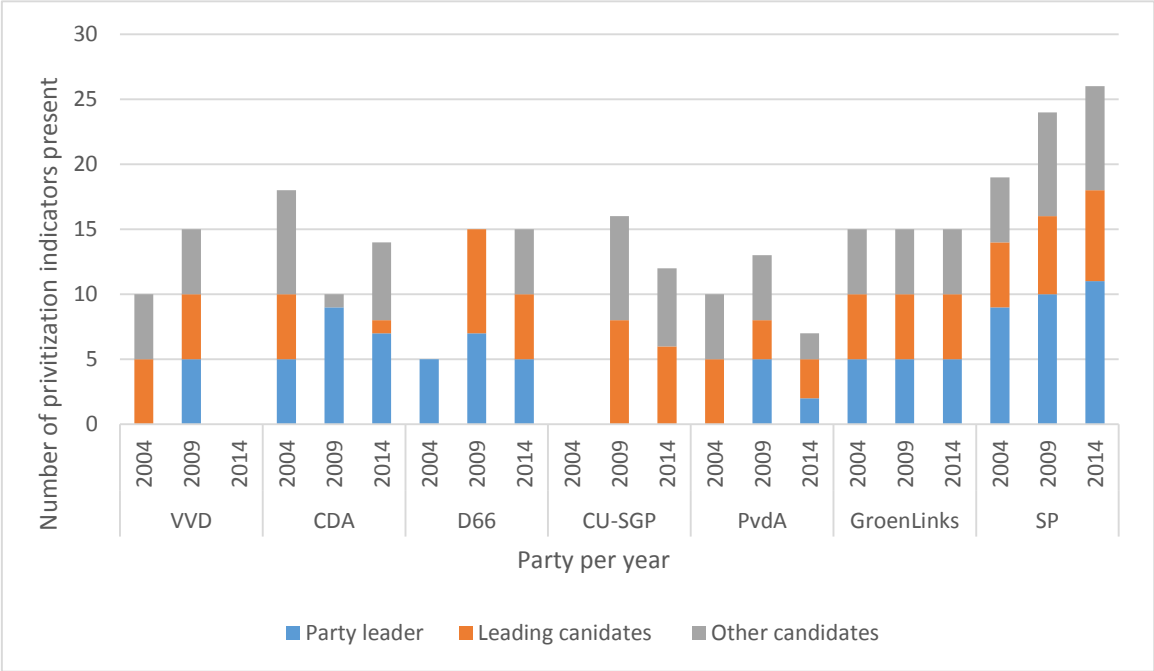
To compare the dimensions and indicators with each other, the coded data has been recoded on a scale from 1 to 5. In this attachment there is an overview of the coding tables. All scores varying from percentages until the times an indicator is present are coded in five categories. The overall scores of the recoded data are provided in Table 6. The numbers in this table are the total scores of the dimension per party and the total scores of the party per year as a sum of the numbers given by the scale.

This table shows that the extent to which the party-websites are personalized has increased every sequential election, this is indicated by the total scores of 107, 143 and 173. Also the extent of personalization increases for every dimension separately, except the privatization dimension. This dimension decreases between 2009 and 2014. This could be explained by the missing values of the VVD in this dimension. However, a possible increase because of new data of the VVD would make no significant increase between the election of 2009 and 2014.

Table 7: Coded overall scores per (sub-) dimensions, party and year

	2004				2009				2014				Party Total
	Visibility	Multimedia	Privitization	Total	Visibility	Multimedia	Privitization	Total	Visibility	Multimedia	Privitization	Total	
VVD	3	5	6	14	3	6	9	18	3	0	0	3	35
CDA	3	6	10	19	3	7	6	16	3	25	8	36	71
D66	2	5	3	10	4	10	8	22	3	14	9	26	58
CU-SGP	3	5	0	8	4	5	8	17	5	7	6	18	43
PvdA	8	5	6	19	4	8	8	20	3	14	4	21	60
GroenLinks	3	5	9	17	3	8	9	20	6	14	9	29	66
SP	4	5	11	20	11	7	12	30	11	16	13	40	90
Totaal	26	36	45	107	32	51	60	143	34	90	49	173	423

Figure 4 provides a total overview of all coded scores for all dimension. This figure shows that the SP is by far the most personalized in every election year. In 2014 also the CDA and GroenLinks were one of the more personalized websites. Concerning the visibility sub-dimension this graph shows a great difference between the SP and the other parties. The other parties are somewhat low in this score. Almost every party increases its total score every sequential election, however the CDA shows an odd pattern, since in 2009 their website was less personal and in 2014 the website was almost as personal as the SP-site. This is considered to be the biggest increase. In general it could be stated that the extent of personalization has increased every sequential election.

Figure: 4 Coded overall scores for (sub-) dimensions per year and party
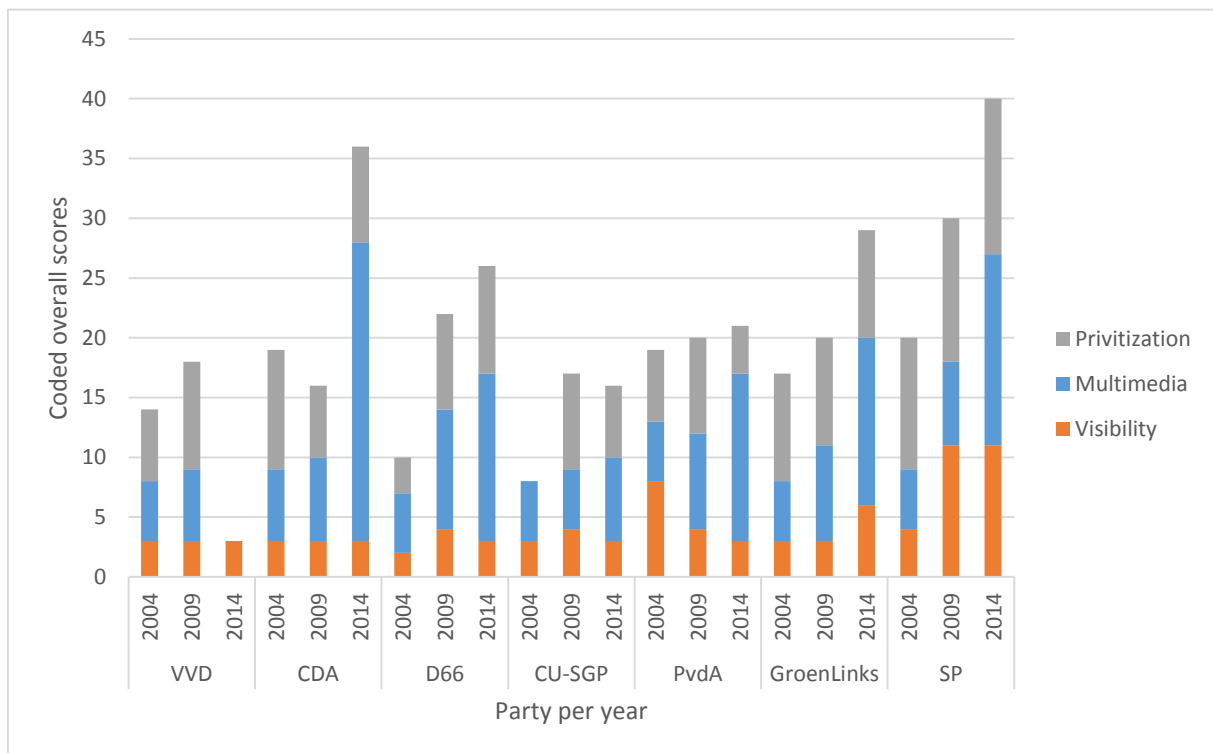
Conclusion

This study aimed to determine whether the extent of personalization within the party-websites has increased during the election campaigns of the European election of 2004, 2009 and 2014. A website is a party's own media source to communicate with voters without the circumvention of a journalist. They can determine internally which information they provide and to what extent they give attention to the candidates and party leaders. Previous studies looked at personal websites only, or the role of the media in the personalization of politics (Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Kriesi, 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2012). This study focuses on the extent to which the parties use the website to present candidates in a personal way during election campaigns.

This research started with the question: '*Does the extent of personalization in the party-websites of the SP, GroenLinks, PvdA, ChristenUnie-SGP, D66, CDA, and VVD increase during the campaigns of the 2004, 2009, 2014 Dutch European Elections*'? To answer this question, a theoretical framework was build followed by a conceptualization of the personalization concept. After that, the concept is operationalised and observed in the party-websites on the moment closest to the election date. The observations are coded and put into tables and graphs and presented. On the basis of these steps the question can be answered.
The extent to which party-websites from the VVD, CDA, D66, CU-SGP, PvdA, GroenLinks, SP are personalized is measured on the basis of visibility, multimedia and privatization. Both visibility (general and concentrated) and multimedia are sub dimensions of the individualization dimension. Privatization is measured on the basis of three sub dimensions: professional, home and family and personal preferences.
First visibility, multimedia and privatization are observed separately, multimedia and privatization are coded manually and visibility is coded automatically on the basis of the described indicators. To code these dimensions separately, it gives the opportunity to take a closer look at the extent of personalization on the level of a sub-dimension. Before that will be discussed, the research question will be answered to an overall extent.

To answer the research question the websites are increasingly personalized in every sequential European election. This conclusion is based on the coded score. The coded score is a scale built on the time the indicators were present on the website. In 2004 a total score of 107 was calculated, in 2009 a score of 143 and in 2014 a score of 173. The overall scores for each dimension did also increase each sequential election, except for the privatization dimension. This dimension shows a small decrease between 2009 and 2014. The multimedia sub-dimension, on the contrary, has increased the most over the years. On a party level it is observed that the SP had the most personalized website in every election year. This party also increases its level of personalization in every election, just as almost every party did increase their level of personalization in the party-websites. The ChristUnie-SGP and the CDA are exceptions. The *visibility* dimension is quite stable for the other parties. Despite of the SP all other parties score quite low on this dimension. The differences between the parties can generally be found in the multimedia and privatization indicators. Both indicators vary to a high extent per party. In the next section conclusions will be made on the level of dimensions.

As stated before, the visibility sub-dimension was not on the level where the difference with other parties was made, except for the SP. More or less, every party has the same overall score. Looking at the development per year most parties even show a decrease in the times the name of the particular politician is mentioned in every sequential election. This could be explained by the assumption that

the size of the website is growing faster than the amount of personal pages.

The second sub-dimension explains the biggest difference between the parties. It is clear that the integration of social media has caused a magnificent increase in the degree of personalization on the party-websites. The fact that the use of conventional communication remains the same over the years confirms this. This is visible in Figure 2 where the graph of 2014 is much higher than the graphs of 2009, except for D66. However, in 2009 they were the first party with adoption of social media to a high extent. Therefore the increase between 2009 and 2014 for D66 is not that big, because in this area very little room for growth was possible. Looking at the last dimension of privatization, the presence of personal information has increased for every kind of politician from 2004 and 2009, but the scores decreased from 2014 to 2009 or remained stable. However, there are great differences between parties. Especially the personal information for the party leader is very different for the parties in every election year. For some parties no evidence is found for personal information of the party leader, other parties pay more attention to the party leader than to the leading candidate of that particular European election. All together the sub-dimensions contribute to an increasing extent of personalization in the party-websites for every sequential election.

Discussion

The most logical explanation for these conclusions is the technological development, since social media presence is considered to have caused a more personal campaign style of parties Effing et al. (2011). However, that does not explain why the other indicators are also increased, since audio-visual media was already present in 2004. An explanation could be the storage room of the websites´ servers, on the other hand if a party would believe that more audio-visual media concentrated on a person would increase the number of votes, it would be worth an investment. Although, producing personalized audio-visual media became a lot easier through the years, also the amount of pictures was still growing. Again, this could be because of the storage room, but it would be still worth an investment. Taking everything into consideration the total extent of personalization and the increase of it over the years could not be explained just by technological developments, but an explanation needs to be searched for by the campaigning strategies of the party in general.

On the contrary, this does not explain that the indicators of privatization do not grow between 2009 and 2014. This could be explained by the fact that websites become bigger and bigger, the personal page of the candidate is often a separate website. In this way the party does not have to store all the information of the candidates or representatives too. Often a description of the professional dimension is available, though. Another explanation is that personal websites of the observed candidates are also used for international purposes, because of the EU parliament. The political fraction of the Dutch party in the European parliament fraction also refers to the personal site of the observed candidates. In this way it could be a lot easier to have a personal website as a candidate. Representatives of the national parliament often have a more enhanced personal page within the party-website, since a personal website is less relevant for them, because of the national character of the parliament.

Finally the question is asked why the mentioning of candidates in the general and concentrated visibility sub-dimension hardly increased between 2009 and 2014. This could be explained because of the fact that in 2014 local departments of parties are often integrated in the main websites, probably for consistency purposes. Therefore, pages of the local departments are also counting as pages for the site. Since these pages are not about politicians on a national level, but on a local level, no extra personal information about the European candidates is added to the main website. This could be an explanation because the absolute amount of candidates' names mentioned in pages has increased from 2009 to 2014 in most of the cases.

Methods

The methods and theoretical framework used in this research are sufficient for its purposes. The extent of personalization in party-websites is determined on the basis of several perspectives. The media perspective is one of the biggest areas of research in their personalization literature. One perspective on the direct measure of the mentioning of politicians and one perspective on the personal information provided by the party about the politicians. This multidimensional approach deals with most of the possible indicators for personalization and combines the different areas of research, since there is hardly any earlier empirical research after this topic. In the first place the scope of the study could be improved. Since the definition of personalization, according to the literature, is the increased attention for candidates and the decreased attention for policy issues. The research only looks at the side of the attention for the candidates. Therefore it is valuable for this area of research to also take the attention for policy-issues into consideration, as discussed in the next paragraph. A second improvement could be made in the method of coding. Most of this is done by hand and by one person. Also the reportation of clicks could be improved. In this research, a

maximum of four clicks (four layers) is used for observation. However, this is quite difficult to report on, because the navigation systems on the website are still functioning very well. This could be caused by the limited storage of the party-websites in the database.

Nowadays it is not possible to store a full party-website. The web techniques are so advanced that the site is spread among more than one server. This makes it too complicated to store a whole party-website. It costs too much time, because sometimes a flaw is three clicks deep. However most of the site is stored and this is more than enough for this research. Unfortunately the sites are not stored automatically, which makes it impossible to collect all websites at the same dates. So, with little improvements, this could also be used for further research, as discussed in one of the following paragraphs.

Other research

If we put the results into perspective, this research describes an increase in personalization in party-websites over the years, Kriesi (2012) already saw a comparable development for the media. Since it was already stated that a website is a type of medium, this confirms the results. Kriesi (2012) also found evidence for a more personalized approach of the media in the Netherlands. In the introduction was stated that a significant amount of attention to the party-leader would indicate that an increase of personalization is the case in other elections as well. Since this is confirmed for the Netherlands in this research, it is likely that the websites during the election campaigns of other elections are also more personalized. Future research must prove this.

Vergeer et al. (2013) already found that Twitter was used redundantly in 2009 during the European elections. Compared to the results in table 5 it was clearly shown that there was made hardly any use of Twitter in 2009. In 2014 however it was widely adopted, just as Effing et al. (2011) preluded in their research. Next to Twitter also other forms of social media increased in the sequential elections. The growing availability of electronic communication and its development is, according to Stanyer (2008), one of the key factors contributing to personalization. This is also confirmed in the conclusion where the biggest increase on a sub-dimensional level is found in the multimedia indicators. To further strengthen this, Gulati and Williams (2007) state that the generation of online campaigns affords website users some degree of coproduction of content (from personalization to blog entries or online chats and virtual town meetings), two-way communication, and follow-ups offline or online. Since the time the indicators were present, which could be used for these purposes, this research also confirms this statement. Finally Lilleker et al. (2014) stated that the use of social media was rather an extension of the campaign methods than a replacement. This is in conformity with the result, also shown in Table 5 that the possibilities for conventional communication stayed rather stable in the period of research and then decreased.

Future research

The personalization of the political landscape is discussed many times in the literature (Bennett, 2012; Hermans & Vergeer, 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2012). Although, there is some disagreement between scholars. Kriesi (2012) states that the alleged personalization refers to two related phenomena: a stronger focus on candidates/politicians instead of parties, institutions, or issues; and a change in the criteria for the evaluation of politicians, from features regarding their professional competence and performance to features concerning non-political personality traits. However, according to this statement, an increase of personalization must lead to a decrease of policy-centred approach, anyhow this assumption is supported by the existing literature. Future research could test if there is a decrease in the policy attention of the same websites used for this research. This would strengthen the conclusion and would contribute to the existing literature since there is very little empirical research done about this concept in party-websites before. Apart from this, future research could also focus on other elections in the Netherlands, since the assumption that a great amount of attention for the party-leader must indicate that proof for increasing personalization can be found in the campaigns for other elections as well.

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Attachment 1: Party abbreviaties

Dutch abbreviation	Dutch name	English name
SGP	Staatkundig gereformeerde partij	Reformed party
VVD	Volkspartij voor vrijheid en democratie	Liberals
CDA	Christen democratisch appèl	Cristian democrats
D66	Democraten 66	Liberal democrats
CU	Christen Unie	Cristian democrats
PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid	Social democrats
GroenLinks	Groen Links	The greens
SP	Socialist Party	Socialist Party

Attachment 2: Observations

Party	General website url	2004	2009	2014
SP	www.sp.nl	3-mei	29-mei	20-mei
VVD	www.vvd.nl	3-mei	29-mei	20-mei
CDA	www.cda.nl	3-mei	25-mrt	20-mei
SGP	www.sgp.nl	3-mei	3-jun	20-mei
CU	www.cu.nl	3-mei	29-mei	20-mei
PvdA	www.pvda.nl	10-jun	29-mei	20-mei
D66	www.d66.nl	9-jun	29-mei	20-mei
GroenLinks	www.groenlinks.nl	10-jun	29-mei	20-mei

Attachment 3: Recoded forms

Table 6 Codes for scale from 1 to 5 used to convert variable into comparable scores

Visibility		Multimedia		Privitization	
Range	Score	Range	Score	Range	Score
1 tot 20	1	1 tot 3	1	1 +2	1
21 tot 40	2	4 tot 6	2	3+4	2
41 tot 60	3	7 tot 9	3	5+6	3
61 tot 80	4	10 tot 12	4	7+8	4
81 tot 100	5	13 tot 15	5	9+10	5

Table 7 Coded privatization

	2004				2009				2014				
	Party leader	Leading canidates	Other candidates	Total	Party leader	Leading canidates	Other candidates	Total	Party leader	Leading canidates	Other candidates	Total	Party Total
VVD	0	3	3	6	3	3	3	9	.	.	.	0	15
CDA	3	3	4	10	5	0	1	6	4	1	3	8	24
D66	3	0	0	3	4	4	0	8	3	3	3	9	20
CU-SGP	.	.	.	0	0	4	4	8	0	3	3	6	14
PvdA	0	3	3	6	3	2	3	8	1	2	1	4	18
GroenLink	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9	27
SP	5	3	3	11	5	3	4	12	5	4	4	13	36
Totaal	14	15	16	45	23	19	18	60	16	16	17	49	154

Table 8 Coded visibility

	2004				2009				2014				
	Party leader	Leading candidate of this election	Other candidates	Total	Party leader	Leading candidate of this election	Other candidates	Total	Party leader	Leading candidate of this election	Other candidates	Total	Party Total
VVD	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	15
CDA	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	15
D66	1	1	0	2	1	2	1	4	1	1	1	3	15
SGP	1	1	0	2	1	5	0	6	1	3	0	4	20
CU	2	1	0	3	1	1	0	2	1	4	0	5	15
PvdA	3	2	3	8	2	1	1	4	1	1	1	3	27
GroenLink	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	2	2	2	6	18
SP	2	1	1	4	5	5	1	11	5	5	1	11	41
Total	12	9	7	28	13	17	6	36	13	18	7	38	166

Table 9 Coded multimedia

		Indicators	VVD	CDA	D66	CU-SGP	PvdA	GL	SP	Total
2004		Conventional communication	1	2	2	2	1	1	4	**13**
		Personal audiovisual media	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	**3**
		Picture Leading candidate	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	**6**
		Picture Party leader	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
		Pictures other candidates	1	2		1	2	1	0	**7**
		Total	**5**	**6**	**5**	**5**	**5**	**5**	**5**	**36**
2009	Other social media	Party account	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	**3**
		leading candidate	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	**2**
		other candidate	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	**2**
		Conventional communication	2	2	2	1	2	2	4	**15**
		Personal audiovisual media	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	**9**
		Picture Leading candidate	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
		Picture Party leader	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**7**
		Pictures other candidates	1	2	1	0	1	1	0	**6**
		Total	**6**	**7**	**10**	**5**	**8**	**8**	**7**	**51**
2014	Facebook	Party account	.	0	1	0	1	1	1	**4**
		leading candidate	.	1	1	0	0	0	1	**3**
		other candidate	.	2	1	0	0	0		**3**
	Twitter	Party account	.	0	1	1	1	1	1	**5**
		leading candidate	.	1	1	1	1	0	1	**5**
		other candidate	.	2	0	0	1	0		**3**
	Other social media	Party account	.	2	0	0	1	0	1	**4**
		leading candidate	.	0	1	0	1	0	1	**3**
		other candidate	.	0	1	0	1	0		**2**
		Twitter Feed	.	1	0	1	0	0	1	**3**
		Conventional communication	.	3	2	1	2	2	4	**14**
		Personal audiovisual media	.	4	2	1	2	2	2	**13**
		Picture Leading candidate	.	2	1	1	1	3	1	**9**
		Picture Party leader	.	2	1	1	1	3	1	**9**
		Pictures other candidates	.	5	1		1	2	1	**10**
		Total	**0**	**25**	**14**	**7**	**14**	**14**	**16**	**90**
		Party-total	**11**	**38**	**29**	**17**	**27**	**27**	**28**	**177**